# Workplace Health and Wellness

Workplace wellness — what is it and what does it mean for employers? What steps can employees take to maintain good health at work? What can organizations do to reduce the use and effects of alcohol and other drugs in the workplace? What is health promotion?

Individual wellness refers to a person's ability to maintain physical and mental wellbeing. This includes doing things that protect and enhance health and reducing or staying away from those things that place health at risk.

Workplace wellness refers to an organization's ability to promote and maintain the physical and mental health of its employees. It is also about reducing risks to employees' health and wellness through safe work practices, healthy work environments and responsible hosting of company events.

Health promotion means giving employees the tools to improve their own health. This can include offering programs like Employee and Family Assistance Programs and Workplace Peer Support.

There are many things that organizations can do to enhance the individual and collective health of their employees.

Read on to learn more about:

- the benefits of getting involved in workplace wellness and health promotion
- what individual employees need in order to be healthy
- how workplaces can contribute to employee health and wellness
- how to host a company social event responsibly

## BENEFITS OF WORKPLACE HEALTH AND WELLNESS INITIATIVES

On average, Canadian workers spend about sixty percent of their waking hours at work. What happens in the workplace can have a huge impact on the overall health of employees.

Having healthy employees is a definite plus for any organization. Healthy employees are more energetic, are less likely to be involved in an accident, are sick less often, and are able to recover from illness faster. Dollars spent on employee health programs usually result in lower absenteeism, reduced sick leave, and lower job accident rates.

The benefits of investing in employee health go far beyond the bottom line. Employers who care about their people take steps to improve the quality of their employees' lives.

## WHAT DO EMPLOYEES NEED IN ORDER TO FEEL HEALTHIER

Employee health can be affected by any of the following:

- *workplace environment* — things like air quality, noise level, exposure to health hazards like dangerous chemicals, lighting, quality of machinery and equipment, and relationships with supervisors and co-workers
- *personal resources and supports* — such as having somewhere to turn if they experience problems or concerns in their personal or work life
- *job control* — the degree of control an employee feels they have over their job, such as having a voice in decision-making and feeling that their opinions matter
- *individual health practices* — things like smoking, drinking, eating habits, exercise, use of medications and ways of dealing with stress

ONE IN A SERIES

The Basics: Alcohol, Other Drugs & Gambling

Alcohol/Drug Policy Development

Employment-Related Alcohol/Drug Testing

Workplace Peer Support

Dealing with the Troubled Employee

The Addicted Employee: After Treatment

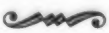
An Addiction in the Family: What It Means for the Workplace

**Workplace Health and Wellness**

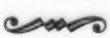
AADAC
Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission
An Agency of the Government of Alberta

Healthy employees need a safe, clean work environment. They also need to feel that they have some control and influence over what happens to them at work. Healthy employees need to practice healthy behaviours and reduce those activities that put their health at risk.

Employees also need social support to help them deal with the stresses of everyday living. This can include maintaining good working relationships with co-workers and supervisors. It can also mean having access to sources of peer support or professional help when personal problems are affecting their mental or physical health.



*Being healthy and feeling well is about more than just the absence of disease!*



## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO BE HEALTHY AND WELL

Being healthy and feeling well is about more than just the absence of disease! In order to be "well" you need to look after your physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. It's important to take personal responsibility for your health.

To feel healthy, you need to feel like your life is in balance and that you have some degree of control over all aspects of your life. In other words, you're in charge of making the choices that help you to maintain your health or make it even better. You're also responsible for stopping or reducing those behaviours that are not healthy.

Some ideas about how you can maintain or enhance your own health are:

- Do things that will improve your health — eat well, exercise regularly, get enough sleep and get regular medical checkups.
- Reduce or stop behaviours that put your health at risk — try to quit smoking, avoid excessive alcohol or drug use and don't over-eat.
- Learn to deal with stress in healthy ways — exercise, talk things out with someone you trust, meditate, get a hobby, or simply learn the skills to relax your mind and your body. Take steps to reduce stress where you can and learn healthy ways to manage stresses that you can't control.
- Get support with the ups and downs of everyday living from friends, co-workers and family members.
- Get professional help when you need it to deal with personal problems.
- Participate in workplace wellness programs or committees to make your workplace as healthy and safe as possible.

## HOW TO IMPROVE EMPLOYEE HEALTH

- *Focus on employees* — help employees understand the consequences of risky behaviours. Emphasize individual responsibility for health and give employees the information and tools they need to reduce risky behaviours and to improve health and safety.
- *Focus on the work environment* — reduce or eliminate sources of stress and health risks for employees. Provide and promote things that safeguard or encourage health for all employees.

Some of the steps an employer can take to increase health and reduce risk are:

### Provide Information and Education

- Have pamphlets, videos and books available to all employees on topics like smoking, alcohol and drug use, problem gambling, stress management, weight control, and anger management.
- Provide courses and seminars on topics such as substance abuse, problem gambling, heart smart cooking, anger management, dealing with conflict, and healthy eating. Consider making these available to family members, too.
- Teach employees to respond to change effectively. Dealing with change continues to be among the greatest sources of individual stress. This stress can be greatly reduced if employees learn the skills and techniques of managing personal and organizational change.

### Establish Policies

- Involve employees in developing policies that promote health and reduce risk. Invite employees, safety representatives, union representatives and managers to participate in designing policies on alcohol and other drug use, safety, smoking, etc.
- Enforce policies that promote health — ensure that smoking bans are enforced, conduct safety audits, and carry out fire and evacuation drills.

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### Promote Employee Participation

- Involve employees in identifying concerns about the work environment. For example, form a committee of employees and management to resolve environmental problems.
- Give employees increased control over what happens to them at work. Employees need to feel that they are listened to, that they have input into decisions that affect them, that they are treated fairly and that they are able to participate in solving problems. Create opportunities for employees to participate in decision-making and to provide input and suggestions regularly. Ensure that they are kept informed through ongoing communication.

### Provide Resources and Support

- Create an Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) that offers employees and their family members confidential, professional help to deal with personal problems. Promote the program regularly and encourage early, voluntary use.
- If you are a smaller organization, develop a list of community resources that are available to assist employees who are experiencing personal problems. Make sure the list is kept updated.
- Invite speakers from community agencies to talk with employees about the health or counselling services that they provide.
- Start a Workplace Peer Support Program. Identify a group of interested employees and give them special training so they know how to listen to their co-workers. Give them the skills and resources to act as a bridge between troubled employees and sources of professional help.
- Support employees in making improvements to their own health. Offer programs to help employees stop smoking, make healthy food alternatives available in lunchrooms, make the stairways attractive and encourage their use, and have exercise equipment available for use during lunch and other breaks.

### Be Flexible and Innovative

Introduce flexibility in work scheduling when possible to assist employees to balance the needs of work and family. Allow them to adjust their hours of work so they can successfully care for aging parents, raise young families, or adjust to physical ailments.

Explore alternatives like job sharing and working from home to enable employees to juggle work and home demands successfully.

## Responsible Hosting of Workplace Social Events

Many workplaces host social events like staff barbecues and Christmas parties. Sometimes alcohol is served at these functions. It is very important for workplaces to practice responsible hosting. Here are some ideas:

- always have non-alcoholic beverages available
- hire a bartender to mix standard, measured drinks
- make sure that the bar is attended at all times and has designated opening and closing times
- make sure food is available during the hours that the bar is open
- offer taxi/bus services or accommodation arrangements to ensure that those guests who have been drinking do not drive
- encourage responsible drinking by setting a "tone" for the event that does not emphasize drinking and offers alternative activities — dancing, games, eating, etc.

*To promote a healthy "workplace culture," take a clear stand on the use of alcohol*

## Preventing Alcohol and Drug Problems in the Workplace

Alcohol and other drug use continues to rank high on the list of concerns that result in referrals to Employee and Family Assistance Programs. While there is no foolproof way of preventing these problems from affecting employees, there are some steps that an organization can take towards the prevention of alcohol and other drug-related problems in the workplace.

To promote a healthy "workplace culture," take a clear stand on the use of alcohol. Policies can prohibit the use of alcohol during work hours and, to send a clear message, this should include lunchtime meetings. To encourage responsibility and safety, it's important to discourage drinking on site after work hours or when employees are driving company vehicles.

Managers and supervisors must set a good example. They are the role models and their actions send a strong message to other employees about what is, and is not, acceptable behaviour.

Education is an easy way to promote safe and responsible behaviours by employees where alcohol and drugs are concerned. Help employees to understand the impact of alcohol and drug use on work performance and safety. Educate them about the effects prescription medication can have on performance. Help them to learn how much is too much and how to know when their alcohol or drug use is becoming a problem.

Have clear rules and guidelines around alcohol and drug use. For example, develop procedures to ensure that the use of prescription medication does not interfere with an employee's fitness for work. Make sure that all employees have copies of policies and procedures and regularly review the rules that govern the workplace. Staff meetings or safety meetings are a good place to review these guidelines quickly and regularly.

It is also important to offer employees easy, confidential access to help if alcohol, drug, gambling or other personal problems are affecting their work performance. Early intervention is the best way to prevent a problem from getting worse.

To increase the chances of early intervention, provide training to all managers and supervisors so that they know how to intervene when employee performance is being affected by personal problems. They also need to know how to refer employees to the appropriate sources of help.

## DEVELOP A WELLNESS COMMITTEE

Most workplaces would agree that there is value and benefit in promoting workplace health and wellness. So how do you get from good intentions to good results? One strategy is to develop a "Wellness Committee."

In larger organizations, this committee might include safety representatives, a member from Occupational Health, someone from the Social Committee, an Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) representative and other interested employees and managers.

In smaller workplaces that do not have an EFAP or Occupational Health department, any group of interested employees can work together to promote workplace health and wellness.

The goals of the Committee will vary from workplace to workplace, but here are some ideas about what the "Wellness Committee" could do:

- organize information sessions for employees and their family members
- set up and maintain a display of pamphlets and brochures aimed at employee health
- organize lunchtime exercise sessions or walks
- organize safety audits, fire and evacuation drills
- conduct surveys of employees to get their ideas about how to improve health and wellness in the work environment
- work with the EFAP to present courses and seminars for employees
- organize fun, social activities that promote health and exercise — hallway bowling, noon ball games, badminton tournaments, etc.
- help promote the Workplace Peer Support Team and the EFAP
- participate in the development or annual review of workplace policies that involve health and wellness

There is a saying that "success breeds success." It's important to start no matter how small or simple the Wellness Committee might be. As employees get involved and start to enjoy the benefits of improved health and wellness, the Committee can grow in numbers and tackle larger projects.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

AADAC (Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission) offers a range of services to assist businesses. These services include:

- information/resources on alcohol, drug and gambling problems
- responsible hosting ideas
- workplace training
- treatment services (including information sessions, assessments, individual/group counselling and intensive treatment)
- AADAC's Business and Industry Clinic (intensive treatment program for workplace referrals, including a cocaine-specific program)

Contact the AADAC office nearest you for more information on any of AADAC's services (listed under Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission in the phone directory) or check AADAC's website at www.aadac.com.